

TRUXTON KING

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A Story of
Graustark
By
GEORGE BARR
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CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST STAND.

SOON after 5 o'clock a man in the remotest window of the tower called down that the forces in the hills were moving in a compact body toward the castle.

One hundred picked men were to be left inside the castle gates with Von Ego, prepared to meet any flank movement that might be attempted. Three hundred mounted men were selected to make the dash down Castle avenue straight into the camp of the sharpshooters. It was the purpose of the house guards to ring a door and noise conflict off the avenue and then retire to the castle as abruptly as they left it, to be ready for Marlaux should he decide to make a final desperate effort to seize their stronghold.

The dash of the 200 through the gates and down the avenue was the most spectacular experience in Truxton's life. He was up with Quinox and General Breeze, galloping well in front of the yelling troops. These mounted carabineers, riding as Redskins, swept like thunder down the street, whirling into the broad, open arena beyond the duke's palace and were upon the surprised defenders before they were fully awake to the situation.

They came tumbling out of barns and sheds, clutching their rifles in nervous hands, against the face of absolute destruction. The enemy, craven at the outset, threw down their guns and tried to escape through the alleys and side streets at the end of the common. Firing all the time, the attacking force rode them down as if they were so many dogs.

After ten or fifteen minutes of this desultory carnage it was reported that a large force of men were entering the avenue from Regency's crenels. Quinox sent his clippers toward this great herd of foot soldiers, but they did not matter, as he had expected. On they swept, 2,000 or 3,000 of them. At their head rode five or six officers. The foremost was Count Marlaux.

Quinox saw now that the Iron Count was determined to storm the gates and gave the command to retreat. Waving their rifles and shouting defiance over their shoulders, the dragons drew up, wheeled and galloped toward the gates.

Scarcely were the massive portals closed and the great steel bars dropped into place by the men who attended them when a low, dull explosion shook the earth as if by volcanic force. Then came the crashing of timbers, the cracking of masonry, the whirling of a thousand missiles through the air. Before the very eyes of the stunned, bewildered defenders, dismounting near the parade ground, the huge gates and pillars fell to the ground.

The gates had been dynamited. Then it was that Truxton King remembered. Marlaux's sappers had been quietly at work for days drilling from the common to the gates. It was a strange coincidence that Marlaux should have chosen this day for his culminating assault on the castle. The skirmish at daybreak had hurried his arrangements no doubt, but none the less was his plan complete. The explosives had been laid during the night.

The fuses reached to the mouth of the tunnel across the common, as he swept up the avenue at the head of his command, hawk faced and with glittering eyes, he snarled the command that put fire to the fuses.

A moment later his vanguard streamed through the aperture and faced the deadly fire from the driveway. At last they began to advance across the grassy meadow. When one man fell under the fire of the guardsmen another rushed into his place. Three times the indomitable Graustarkians drove them back and as often did Marlaux drag them up again, exalted by the example he set.

"God, he is a soldier!" cried Truxton. "Hello! There's my friend Brutus. He's no coward either. Here's a try for you, Brutus."

He dragged to his knee and took deliberate aim at the frenzied henchman. The discovery that there were three bullets in Brutus' breast when he was picked up long afterward did not affect the young man's contention that this was the one that had found the heart.

The fall of Brutus urged the Iron Count to greater fury. His horse had been shot from under him. He was on his feet, calling to his men to follow him as he moved toward the stubborn row of green and red. Bullets hissed about his ears, but he gave no heed to them.

The commander of the guard gave the command to fall back slowly toward the castle.

Firing at every step, they crossed the parade ground and then made a quick dash for the shelter of the long balconies. Marlaux, down in the parade ground, was fairly pushing his men into the jaws of death.

Truxton King's chance to pay his debt to Von Ego came after one of the fiercest, most determined charges. The young count had been fighting desperately for some time. His weakness seemed to have disappeared. As the foe fell back in the face of desperate resistance Von Ego sprang down the steps and rushed after them, calling others to join him in the attempt to complete the rout. Near the edge of the terrace he stopped. His leg gave way under him, and he fell to the ground. Truxton saw him fall. He leaped over the low balustrade, dropping his hot rifle, and dashed across the terrace to his rival's assistance. A hundred men shot at him.

"It's my turn!" shouted the Ameri-

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He seized the wounded man in his strong arms, threw him over his shoulder and staggered toward the steps.

"Release me, curse you!" shrieked Von Ego, striking his rescuer in the face with his fist.

"It's saving you for another day," said King as he dropped behind the balustrade with his burden safe.

There were other witnesses to Truxton's rash act. In a lofty window of the north wing crouched a white faced girl and a grim old man. The latter held a rifle in his tawny though feeble hands. Now and then the old man would sight his rifle and fire. The girl who crouched beside him was there to designate a certain figure in the ever changing mass of humanity on the bloody parade ground. Her clear eyes sought for and found Marlaux; her unwavering finger pointed him out to the old marksman.

His aim was about her; her hand nestled securely against his shoulder, and her slim hands were willing prisoners in one of his.

She was saying: "Truxton, dear, I did not love Erle Von Ego. I just thought it was love. I never really knew what love was until you came into my life. That's what made it so hard. I had let him believe that I might care for him some day. And I did like him. So I—"

"You will never, never know how happy I am, Loraine," he breathed into her ear.

"I hope I shall always bring happiness to you, Truxton," she murmured, faint with the joy of loving.

"You will make me very unhappy if you don't marry me tomorrow."

"I will marry you, Truxton, when we get to New York," she said, but not very firmly. He saw his advantage.

He held her close for a long time, his face buried in her hair. "Listen, darling! Won't you say you'll be my wife before I leave Graustark? I want you so much. I can't go away without you."

She hesitated. "When are you going, Truxton? You haven't told me."

It was what he wanted. "I am going next Monday," he said promptly. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten the day of the week they were now living in.

"Monday? Oh, dear!"

"Will you?"

"I—I must cable home first," she faltered.

"That's a mere detail, darling. Cable afterward. It will beat us home by three weeks. They'll know we're coming."

"I must ask John, really I must, Truxton," she protested faintly.

"Hurry!" he shouted in a whisper. "He is so desperately in love he won't think of refusing anything we ask. Shall we set it for Saturday?"

They set it for Saturday without consulting John Tullis and then fell to discussing him. "He is very much in love with her," she said wearily.

"And she loves him, Loraine. They will be very happy. She's wonderful!"

"Well, so is John. He's the most wonderful man in all this world."

"I am sure of it," he agreed eagerly. "I saw him talking with her and the Duke of Perse as I came out awhile ago. They were going to the duke's rooms up there. The duke will offer no objections. He'll permit his daughter to select his next son-in-law."

"I shall be sorry to leave Graustark," she said dreamily after a long period of silent retrospection. "I've had the happiest year of my life here."

"I've had the busiest month of my life here. I'll never again say that the world is a dull place. I shudder when I think of what might have happened to you, my prince, sweetheart, if I hadn't come to Edelweiss. I would not have found you." Feeling her trembling in his arms, he went on with whimsical good humor: "You would have been eaten up by the ogre long before this, or perhaps you would have succeeded in becoming a countess."

cried out to her if emotion had not clogged his throat.

"Erle," she whispered at last, drawing back to his arms and looking into his eyes with a great pity in her own. "Is he—he is dead, Truxton?"

"No," he said gently. "Daddy hurt but—"

"He will not die!" Thank God Truxton. He is a brave—oh, a very brave man!"

Leadless between the deadly fires, the necessities gave up the fight after a brief stand at the terrace.

The prince reigned again.

CHAPTER XXI.

"YOU WILL BE MRS. KING."

It was late in the day when Truxton King was summoned to the devastated state chamber to be made a baron, and the prince completed the American's reward by presenting him with an ancient gold seal ring, one of the crown jewels.

Late that night it was reported at the castle that a large force of men were camped on the opposite side of the river. A hundred companies were gleaming against the distant uplands.

"The Grand Duke Paulus!" exclaimed Count Halfont. "Thank God he did not come a day earlier. We owe him nothing today, but yesterday—ah, he would have demanded much of us!"

In one of the wrecked approaches to the terrace, surrounded by fragments of stone and confronted by ugly destruction, sat a young man and a slender girl. There were no lights near them. The shadows were black and forbidding.

His arm was about her; her hand nestled securely against his shoulder, and her slim hands were willing prisoners in one of his.

She was saying: "Truxton, dear, I did not love Erle Von Ego. I just thought it was love. I never really knew what love was until you came into my life. That's what made it so hard. I had let him believe that I might care for him some day. And I did like him. So I—"

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branch lines of the imperial roads.

And so it was that at midday he rode in pomp and splendor through the city gates, attended by his staff and a rather overpowering bodyguard.

The grand duke, with all the arrogance of a real personage, was late. It was not for him to consider the conditions that distressed the court of Graustark—not at all. He was a grand duke and he would take his own time in paying his respects. When he finally presented himself at the castle doors a sleepy group of attendants actually yawned in his presence.

No one had slept during the night just passed. Excitement and the suffering of others had denied slumber to one and all, even to those who had not slept for many days and nights. Now the reaction was upon them. Relaxation had succeeded tension.

When the grand duke entered the great, somber drawing room he was confronted by a meticulously polite assemblage, but every eye was as heavy as lead and as prone to sink.

The prince sat far back in the great chair of his ancestors, his sturdy legs sticking straight out in front of him. The grand duke advanced between the respectful lines and knelt at the foot of the throne.

"Arise, your highness," piped Bobby, with a quick glance at Count Halfont. It was a faint, faraway voice that uttered the gracious command. "Graustark welcomes the Grand Duke Paulus. It is my pleasure to—"

A helpless look came into his eyes. He looked everywhere for support. The grand duke saw that he had forgotten the rehearsed speech and smiled benignly as he stepped forward and kissed the hand that had been extended somewhat uncertainly.

"My most respectful homage to your majesty. The felicitations of my emperor and the warmest protestations of friendship from his people."

With this as a prologue he engaged himself in the ever pleasant task of delivering a long congratulatory address. After five minutes of high sounding platitudes he again turned to the prince. It was then that he received his first shock.

Prince Robin was sound asleep. His head was slipping sideways along the satin back of the big chair, and his chin was very low in the laze at his neck. The grand duke coughed emphatically, cleared his throat and grew very red in the face.

The court of Graustark was distinctly discomposed.

"His majesty appears to have—ahem—gone to sleep," remarked the grand duke tartly, interrupting himself to address the prime minister.

"He is very tired, your excellency," said Count Halfont, very much distressed. "Pray consider what he has been through during the day."

"Ah, my dear count, do not apologize for him. I quite understand. Ahem! Ahem!" Still, he was very red in the face.

"I will awaken him, your excellency," said the prime minister, edging toward the throne.

"Not at all, sir!" protested the visitor. "Permit him to have his sleep out, sir. I will not have him disturbed. Who am I that I should defect the claims of nature? It is my pleasure to wait until his majesty's nap is over. Then he may dismiss us, but not until we have cried 'Long live the prince!'"

For awhile they stood in awkward silence, this notable gathering of men and women. Then the prime minister in hushed tones suggested that it would be eminently proper under the circumstances for all present to be seated. He was under the impression that his serene highness would sleep long and soundly.

Stiff backed and uncomfortable, the court sat and waited. No one pretended to conceal the blissful yawns that would not for all present to be seated. A drowsy, ineffably languid feeling took possession of the entire assemblage.

The prime minister sat at the foot of the throne and nodded in spite of himself. John Tullis, far back near the wall, had his head on his hand, bravely fighting off the persistent demon, Prince Paulus of Dawsbergen, was sound asleep.

The grand duke was wide awake. He saw it all and was equal to the occasion. After all, he was a kindly old gentleman and, once his moment of mortification was over, he was not above charity.

Bobby's poor little head had slipped over to a most uncomfortable position against the arm of the chair. Putting his finger to lips, the grand duke then took carefully up to the throne. With very gentle hands he lifted Bobby's head and, infinitely tender, stuffed a throne cushion behind the curly head. A splendid smile in his eyes, he tipped back to his chair.

As he passed Count Halfont, who had risen, he whispered: "Dear little man! I do not forget, my lord, that I was once a boy. God bless him!"

Then he sat down, conscious of a fine feeling of goodness, folded his arms across his expansible chest and allowed his beaming eyes to rest upon

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against the thick cushions.

Everywhere they dozed and nodded. The grand duke smiled and blinked his little eyes. He was very wide awake.

That is how he happened to see the prince move restlessly and half open his sleep bound eyes. The grand duke leaped forward with his hand to his ear and listened. He had seen the boy's lips move. From dreamland came Bobby's belated "good night."

THE END.

Mayor Christy of Phoenix has suspended Leo Troutman, a member of the police force, pending an investigation of charges of undignified political activities.

Hon. Robert E. Morrison of Prescott and Eugene Brady O'Neil and Frank DeSousa have been selected as speakers at the territorial council of the Knight of Columbus, which will be held in Tucson May 13 and 15.

HOUSECLEANING GIRL



WHEN she cleans up her whole household, How she makes it spick and span! Where she's busy with her broomstick, There's no place for me, a man.

LET me seek a quiet corner, Out of harm's way and the fuss, Where I can idle round and watch her Work enough for both of us.

WHEN she tackles room of her pantry, How she sets it in a whirl! She's as active as a cyclone, Is my swift housecleaning girl!

HOW WE COULD DO IT.

WE may or may not be an extravagant nation, but if we were minded to buckle right down to it there would be billions of dollars rolling along the sidewalks and portmanteaus stacked high over every dinner table.

Our coatless buttons cost millions of dollars a year. All weeklies cost millions of dollars a year.

Two quarts of milk can be watered to make four.

A return to rag carpets would save a billion dollars a year.

A little shaver hurs on one, and yet we buy millions of dollars' worth of umbrellas.

A beef bone will yield seven different times.

No man ever has a knife in his pocket when asked for it, and yet we spend \$40,000,000 a year for cutlery.

Potatoes can be mashed with a brick, and yet the mashers cost the country \$4,000,000 a year.

American tip waiters and servants to the tune of \$5,000,000 a year. All this could go toward raising turkeys.

A tick smitten with straw makes a bed that kings have slept on.

If all the potato peelings now thrown away were made into raspberry jam we could do away with a thousand poorhouses.

By sitting with bedbugs around us we could reduce the fuel bill one-half.

Forks got along without forks up to the year 1005 and were happy.

Two raw turnips will fill a man up just as much as a \$10 dinner at Delmonico's. Heels are a superfluity on boots and shoes, and yet they cost us \$50,000,000 a year.

An old coat for a pillow would save us \$4,000,000 a year in goose feathers. A man looks at his watch but once in the 24 hours, and yet the annual sales are \$20,000,000 per annum.

JOE KERR.

GOOD WALKING.

JOHN—Fencer must be a ideal place for actors.

HENRY—Why so?

JOHN—It has the best roads in the world.



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Two Solid Men.

YOU had only to look at them to see that they were content and solid, the sort of men that keep the big world turning round—the men that drive deep into finance, politics and the social problems.

"New day?" queried one.

"Yes."

"A very nice day."

"It is."

"Ever see such weather as this for this time of year?"

"No, never."

"It surely must be spring?"

"Oh, yes."

"This will take the frost out of the ground."

"It will, sir."

"Makes me think of new colors."

"And me, too."

"Then your opinion is—?"

"Is that winter is over."

"And that's mine, too."

And then the two solid men, their great work accomplished, settled back in their seats and showed signs of relief, and an old man who had been an eager listener to their talk exclaimed to himself:

"Great Scotts, but while I am blind in one eye and the old woman is deaf in one ear, we could have saved the country with half that talk!"

JOE KERR.

FINE CROPS.

Visitor—Do you raise anything worth while in your garden?

Joe Farmer—I should say so. It's the best place for raising worms in the entire village.

A MILD PROTEST.

April showers.

I will agree.

But good for flowers—

Are not for me.